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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this report is the nature of the reliance by children on prior native language (L1) knowledge in naturalistic, untutored second language (L2) acquisition. It is suggested that L1 reliance is systematic, in that specific conditions have to be met within the child's L2 development before he or she will, or can, draw on previous L1 knowledge. Therefore reliance on L1 should be predictable within a given developmental sequence. It seems that, in the long run, these predictions may be statable in terms of acquisitional principles in the tradition of Jakobson (1941), Slobin (1973) and Wode (1976). The regularities children follow are those governing language acquisition and determining the structure of developmental sequences. These principles have to be interpreted psychologically and/or neurologically. The main portion of the data, collected daily for six months, came from four German children aged 3 years 11 months to 8 years 11 months. This study concentrates on the acquisition of English negation. (Author/AMH)

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ON THE SYSTEMATICITY OF L1 TRANSFER IN L2 ACQUISITION +)

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Abstract

The main concern of this report is the nature of the reliance on prior L1 knowledge in naturalistic, i.e. untutored L2 acquisition. It is suggested that L1 reliance is systematic in that specific conditions have to be met within the child's L2 development before he will (can?) draw on his previous L1 knowledge. Therefore reliance on L1 should be predictable within a given developmental sequence. It seems that, in the long run, these predictions may be statable in terms of acquisitional principles somewhat in the tradition of Jakobson 1941, Slobin 1973, Wode 1976a.

The main portion of the data come from German children acquiring English as L2. Their acquisition of English negation will be selected for special scrutiny.

+) Expanded version of Arbeitspapiere zum Spracherwerb, Nr. 16. Englisches Seminar der Universität Kiel

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THE KIEL PROJECT

This report has grown out of my Kiel project on language acquisition. Our main aim is to work towards an integrated theory of language acquisition. We attempt to bring within the scope of one theory both the commonalities between all acquisitional types as well as the differences between them. The need for such a theory derives from the fact that only man is capable of acquiring a human language, in fact, he can acquire more than one, he can do so under different circumstances, he can forget them, and he can re-learn them. Consequently we systematically trace the acquisition of selected structural areas of English and German across these various acquisitional types. We now have at our disposal data on the L1 acquisition of German, the L1 acquisition of English, the naturalistic L2 acquisition of German acquired by children with English as L1, the naturalistic L2 acquisition of English acquired by children with German as L1, and the L2 acquisition of English as taught to German students.

It seems to me that we are likely to get a much clearer understanding of man's capacity for language acquisition if we do not only search for universal strategies and principles in L1 acquisition. We should also investigate their resistance against manipulation, as in language teaching, and their impact relative to each other when two or more languages clash acquisitionally as in the various types of bilingualism. In many respects, therefore, naturalistic L2 acquisition is pivotal for the whole field of language acquisition. L2 research is likely a) to have an impact on L1 research in that it may show which L1 regularities die away and which are reactivated for I2 acquisition; b) it foreshadows L2 teaching in that it may illuminate the extent to which the L2 acquisitional regularities can be manipulated. Here our aim is not to re-iterate such global assertions that, for instance, there is L1 transfer. The goal must be to unravel the details that govern such processes.

The Kiel project has deliberately been designed around my four children. They were our informants for L1 German (Wode 1974, 1976a, 1977b) as well as

for L2 English/L1 German (Wode 1975, 1976c, Wode et al. 1977). The data on L2 German/L1 English were collected from American, Australian and British children whose parents had moved to the Kiel vicinity (Lange 1975, Felix 1976a-d, Felix 1977).

The material on L2 English/L1 German was collected during a half year field trip to Northern California in 1975. The four children were then aged 3,11 - 8,11. The data were collected in a longitudinal day-by-day routine both by tape recording as well as by taking notes at the scene of action. From time to time I have also conducted experiments to check out various structural areas. (For further detail, see the works cited above.)

THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES FOR L2 ENGLISH/L1 GERMAN NEGATION

The major stages for L2 English/L1 German as recorded from my four children are summarized in tab. 1. The chronology of the structural types is as implied by the numbering. Those types numbered by Roman numerals and subgrouped according to Arabic numerals are developmentally ordered as given by the numbering. Those types that are marked by small letters a, b, ... are structurally distinct but may occur at much the same time as indicated by the numerals.

STAGE I: The first negative utterances to appear invariably involved no. Semantically, this was anaphoric negation, i.e. the negative relationship did not hold between Neg and the items with which it occured in construction.

STAGE II: It comprises type II.2. The word order pattern is much the same as in type II.1. Neg is no. It is placed externally. Different from stage I the negative relationship is now non-aphoric, i.e. it holds between Neg and the items with which it occurs in construction. For instance, no play baseball means 'I/we don't want to play baseball'. (For details on the terms anaphoric vs. non-anaphoric negation see Wode 1977b)

STAGE III: With all four children the first sentences with internal placement of Neg were reflexes of target copula structures, i.e. III.1.

Tab. 1 The major developmental structural types and stages in the L2 English/L1 German acquisition of negation (adapted from Wode in prep.)

structural type			illustrative example	stage
I	anaphoric: Neg		no	I
II.1	anaphoric: Neg X		no, Tiff	
	X Neg		Kenny, no	
2	non-anaphoric: Neg X			II
	no V		no finish	
	N		no milk	
	Adj		no cold	
	VP		no play baseball	
III.1	Subj (be)	Neg X		III
	that's	no Adj	that's no right	
	you	not N	you not dummy	
		no	it's no Francisco	
III.2a	Subj Neg V			IV
	not		I'm not go Bett	
	no		me no close the window	
III.2b	Subj V (Pron) Neg X		I'm steal not the base	
			Marylin like no sleepy	
	M Neg X		I cannot say that word	
III.2c	Imperative: don't VP		don't broke	
III.2d	Imperative: V (Pron)		shut not your mouth	
	not X		hit it not over the fence	
IV.a	supletive don't/didn't		no, don't	V
IV.b	Subj don't/didn't Aux VP		I don't can eat anymore	
	Aux		you didn't can that	
	VP		I didn't have a snag	

STAGE IV: Utterances containing a full verb (V) and with Neg placed internally are consistently later than strings reflecting target copula structures. Neg may be no and/or not. All in all, there were 4 major structures, III.2a-d, co-occuring at this stage of development. The type III.2a does not become (very) productive. Among the imperative types III.2c is the more productive one. In non-imperative

declarative sentences, then, the children seem to operate with a single Neg placement rule with Neg placed behind the first verb no matter whether V or Aux. During stages III-IV, therefore, there are no mistakes regarding the placement of Neg in declarative negative sentences that contain an Aux or a form of be. However, the structural type IV.b clearly shows that at stages III-IV the children cannot be credited with a proper L2 placement rule, since they handle both V and Aux alike.

L1 RELIANCE WITH L2 ENGLISH/L1 GERMAN NEGATION

To illustrate the nature of the reliance on L1 I shall single out the types III.2b and IV.b for two reasons: a) To my knowledge, neither one has yet been reported for L1 English, hence they are L2 specific; b) again, to my knowledge, they have been reported only for certain L2 English combinations, i.e. in addition to L2 English/L1 German for L2 English/L1 Norwegian (Ravem 1968, 1969, Wode 1974), but not for L2 English/L1 Taiwanese (Huang 1971), L2 English/L1 Japanese (Milon 1974).
It follows that such L2 pecularities must be due to the structure of L1 involved in a given L2 combination. In fact, both German and Norwegian place Neg after the finite verb no matter whether V or Aux. English, of course, requires do-support for V with Neg placed before V.

The puzzle about III.2b is threefold: a) Why do the children produce such utterances at that particular stage of their development, and not, say, at II.2? b) By adopting III.2b the children move away from the target, because via III.2a they were already closer to the English preverbal no/not than they are via III.2b with post-verbal no/not. c) The explanation cannot be that at II.2 the children did not fall back on their L1 rule because they could not distinguish between V and N. This they could as is obvious from the non-negated utterances of that time. There must be other prerequisites that favor L1 transfer.

I like to think that the acquisition of type III.1 creates the prerequisites to enable, and to induce, the children to bring in their L1 Neg placement rule. More generally, a L2 child will draw on his L1 only if crucial prerequisites are met within his own L2 development. Such prerequisites are a sufficient degree of similarity between the structures involved. Apparently, II.2 was outside this crucial range; III.1 was inside it. Namely, the Neg placement rules of German and English are partly the same.

They fully agree with respect to the copula. Hence at II.2-III.2b copula utterances are target-like. Blunders in copula utterances do not involve the position of Neg in relation to the V's. With respect to V structures German and English differ. The children seem to experiment with both the German and the English rule (cf. types III.2a vs. III.2b). Eventually, L1, i.e. German wins out. There is additional word order evidence to suggest that the above developmental detour is not specific to negation.

Felix 1976b found the acquisition of the VP for L2 German/L1 English as summarized in tab. 2. The structural type III.1 is superficially target-like with V in final position as required by German. Next the children revert to their L1 word order by placing V behind Aux. This is not target-like. German requires such V's in complex VP's at the end. Thus in III.1 the children were already very close to the mark. In III.2 they move away from it. In III.3 they have to approach the target again. That this is likely to be a reflex of a more general regularity is further suggested by our data on the acquisition of the VP in L2 English/L1 German. The four children started out with III.2 of tab. 2, then III.1, and then III.2 again. Utterances like I want no bei/by you sit,'I don't want to sit next to you', I cannot the crickets catch, 'I can't catch the crickets' belong with the intermediate stage(s) of their development.

The type IV.b poses slightly different problems. There is no reason why the children should not use the rise of don't/didn't to differentiate Aux from V as required by English. After all, they will do so after stage V. Moreover, that they could distinguish between Aux and V at a time prior to stage V is clear, for instance, from their L2 command of English word order in non-negated utterances at least since the rise of type III.1. And most puzzling of all, they were already close to such a differentiation with respect to negation once before, namely via the structural types III.1 and III.2a. The latter type, i.e. pre-V Neg, though not (very) productive, was limited to V sentences. Instead, throughout the types III.1-IV.b the children seem to prefer one set including Aux and V which is positionally not differentiated with respect to Neg. And the children do this although it looks as if that way they take a developmental detour.

Tab. 2 Developmental sequences for the L2 acquisition of the VP in German by children with English as L1 (Excerpted from Felix 1976b)

I copula structures

ich sein a baby (I am a baby)

II simple VP

du kannst blau (you can blue (= you can have the blue ones))

III complex VP

1. Subj Aux N V
Adv

ich hat alles essen (I have all eaten (=I have eaten all))

2. Sub Aux V N
Adv

ich hab gesehen du (I have seen you)

3. Subj Aux N V
Adv

ich habe dich gesehen (I have you seen (= I have seen you))

CONCLUSION: JAKOBSON-LIKE PRINCIPLES IN L2 ACQUISITION

To talk about developmental detours is, of course, totally misleading. The children are not taking detours. They are following the regularities that govern L2 acquisition and they do so even if the total process may create the impression as if it involves detours. These regularities determine the structure of the developmental sequences. Basically these regularities are psychological processes of, at present, largely unknown sorts. Nonetheless, these processes take linguistic structures as their input (L-in); and they produce linguistic structures as - the child's - output (L-out). The orderliness of the developmental sequences suggests that L-out is systematically

related to L-in; and that, consequently, L-out can be predicted on the basis of the struture of L-in given a set of principles of the following sort: If L-in has the structures x, y, z they will be acquired in a specific order, say, z, x, y. This is the basic insight of Jakobson 1941. +) note that such principles can be formulated in purely linguistic terms. Though, in the long run, they can, and have to be, interpreted psychologically and/or neurologically. Moreover, it is obvious, from the parallels and differences between the L1 and L2 developmental sequences that some of these principles will be the same for L1 and L2, others will be L2 specific, i.e. including those that relate to L1 transfer. And there is also evidence that some of these principles apply alike to L1, naturalistic L2 and foreign language teaching (cf. Wode 1977a).

FOOTNOTE

+) I wish to emphasize that I am referring only to the language acquistional aspects of Jakobson's insights, not to his claims about the relationship between language acquisition, language pathology, and linguistic evolution. Furthermore, I don't mean to suggest that Jakobson's theory is in accord with the empirical facts. I see the parallel in his basic insight.

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